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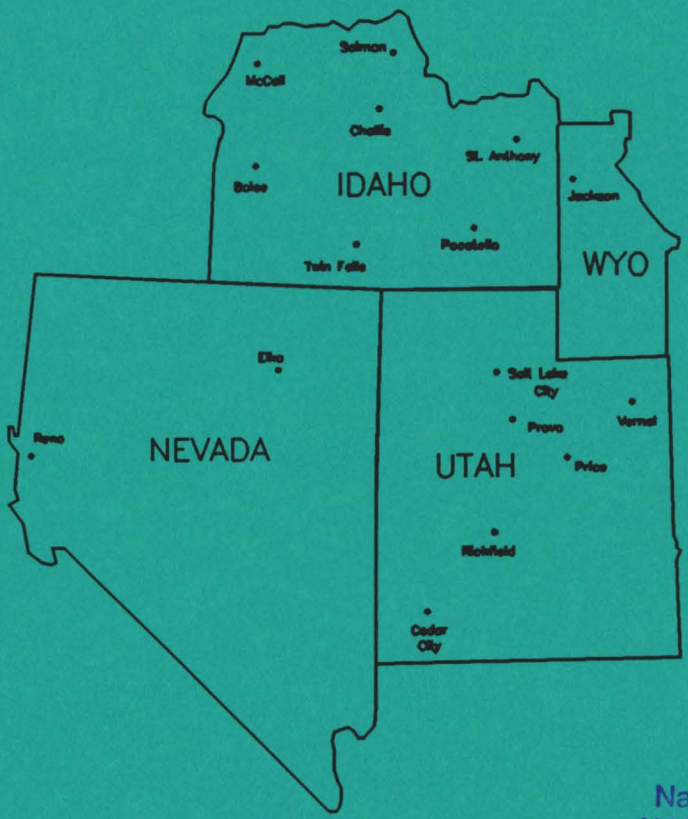
Regional Forester Review

Caribou NF
1992



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John Butt, Director, Planning and Budget
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6/9/92

CARIBOU REGIONAL FORESTER REVIEW
"People Make Miracles"

1. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

This Regional Forester Review is the first in the Intermountain Region since 1990. This is also the first review done by a team that included retirees.

The team met in April prior to the review and agreed on the following four objectives to guide the review:

OBJECTIVES:

1. How well has the Forest Plan been implemented, and what changes appear to be needed in revision? What issues should be addressed in the Plan revision--initiate the revision scoping.

2. Gain Regional Office understanding and recognition of Forest activities, and provide evaluation of effectiveness of internal and external management systems.

3. Evaluate effectiveness of Caribou organization structure, teamwork, and leadership.

4. Develop impressions and identify problems.

The Caribou Regional Forester Review was conducted in May 1992 through a combination of interviews and field trips. The team met with a representation of all employee levels, as well as a wide range of external contacts.

The review team perceived no major managerial problems on the Caribou National Forest. The employees of the Forest are dedicated and hard working; and the resource conditions seem to be either in good status or, when a problem is encountered, it is being worked on in one way or another.

Employees morale is on an upswing, with negative influences coming from outside the control of Regional and Forest management.

The Forest Supervisor and his Management Team are considered more effective by employees than they observed 2-5 years ago.

2. COMMENDATIONS

-- The observance of Quality Recognition Day, which recognized individuals and groups either with awards or certificates of appreciation in an atmosphere of celebration.

-- The empowerment of people through the Malad District Organizational Model.

-- The sharing of teamwork training with local residents and other agency personnel by Malad District.

-- The support and advice given to Mary Reichman on her assuming the management of the Pebble Creek Ski Area by the Pocatello District and Forest Recreation personnel.

-- The excellent results in the installation of the Simplot phosphate slurry line.

-- The good partnerships demonstrated in the phosphate mining operations, both in the field and in the development of educational video tape on Soda Springs District.

-- The Trail Canyon volunteer project on the Soda Springs Ranger District, resulting in an excellent winter sports trailhead and day use area. The spirit of cooperation was also very evident at the Malad District Third Creek Trailhead project, where ranchers voluntarily rehabilitated the recreation trailhead facilities.

-- The efforts of the Montpelier District Ranger in maintaining a presence in the City of Preston.

-- The Forest has excellent external relations based on the sample of people the team interviewed, met on the field trip, or elsewhere.

-- Ingenuity and innovation are apparent Forest-wide. An example is the use of a wheat cropping system on the Curlew National Grasslands. A wheat crop was used to offset costs of private plowing to eradicate an undesirable low-productivity Poa grass.

-- Minnetonka Cave with improved public service, good customer need sensitivity, an improved cave lighting system, and excellent interpretative services for 11,000 visitors per year.

-- Dutch Oven cooking has been refined to an art form on the Caribou National Forest.

3. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS BY REVIEW OBJECTIVE

OBJECTIVE 1. How well have we implemented the Forest Plan and what changes appear to be needed in Revision? What issues should be addressed in the Plan Revision? Initiate the Revision Scoping.

Findings

In general, the Forest Plan is being faithfully implemented on the Forest, and all personnel seem aware of and committed to its execution.

The monitoring information suggests:

- There has been little controversy in implementation.
- The budget may have shifted to be in closer alignment with the plan.
- Output accomplishments seem on target in timber, activities are falling short in the recreation and wildlife habitat improvement areas (MAR report).

The Forest staff findings and evaluation indicate:

- 20 items suggest adjustments in implementation actions needed.
- 37 items monitored need more evaluation or changes in monitoring systems, or they were found irrelevant.
- 5 Forest Plan amendments are needed.
- 9 items should be included in revision.

There is considerable concern among employees that the Plan is unclear and ambiguous, making it very difficult to execute with confidence and efficiency. Examples we heard were:

- The goals and desired future conditions of management areas compared to the current situation is not at all clear in many situations.
- The suited timber acres estimated in the Plan are not found in on-the-ground implementation, especially on the Montpelier District.
- Timber yield estimates were questioned.
- Hard to find things in the Plan.

While the Forest Plan is ambiguous in many respects, the Team did not identify major issues requiring significant amendment or revision. The significant insect mortality problems may require some adjustments in the Plan.

There are numerous issues that suggest needs to adjust and especially to clarify the Plan through amendments or perhaps through revision.

-- AUM estimates may be too high.
-- Insect mortality.
-- Timber suitability mapping errors.
-- Goshawk, snag, fish habitat, and deer winter range standards.
-- Biodiversity objectives and standards.
-- Management indicator revision.
-- Range use and ecological condition standards.
-- New market demands for aspen.
-- New market demand for small diameter lodgepole.
-- Change in rate of fire spread prescription.
-- Miles of road construction.

Forest employees feel they must have an operational GIS to aid in revision.

The Forest has faithfully executed the Forest Plan appeal settlement agreement dated December 1, 1986. However, there is no precise report to give the Parties on accomplishment and status.

Suggestions ([objective number]-[suggestion number])

1-1 Region should continue to provide authorization and priority in getting GIS operational on the Caribou.

1-2 The Forest should assess "pre revision" needs such as inventory data, staff skills, training needed, RO guidance needed, and GIS.

1-3 The Forest should develop a detailed work plan for revising the Plan. Balancing the revision readiness needs with urgency to resolve issues is needed. We believe some delay may be desirable in order to effectively use GIS in the Revision.

1-4 Single-issue amendments should be processed.

1-5 The RO should provide timber and integrated inventory assistance to the Forest as previously scheduled, especially the Montpelier Ranger District.

1-6 The Forest will need to reconcile Plan information with the current stand data to determine if there is sufficient information to justify an amendment to adjust the suited base and ASQ.

1-7 Regional Forester request report to Parties to the settlement agreement.

OBJECTIVE 2. Gain Regional Office understanding and recognition of Forest activities and provide evaluation of effectiveness of internal and external management systems.

Findings

Personnel throughout the Forest feel that the Caribou NF is severely short of funds. Capital investment monies have been virtually nil for the past 3 years, and expectations are that this will continue for the forseeable future. Over 80 percent of all funds are expended in personnel salaries and fixed costs (utilities, rents, etc.) This problem is not felt to be recognized by the RO and assistance (and moral support) provided. Considerable work, targets, projects, and activities are being accomplished through hard work and innovative activities by Caribou NF personnel. This is not perceived as understood nor recognized by the RO Staff. Even with this, morale on part of the Caribou NF personnel is found to be adequate and trending upward. Any negative morale was found to be related to inability to accomplish things to the level of their personal expectations and desires. With adequate funds, they could accomplish considerably more.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to handle overhead and fixed costs. Consolidation opportunities are not being addressed as one of the possible solutions to this concern.

As further evidence of the lack of understanding by the RO staff of the work on the Caribou, the infrequency of RO staff visits to the Caribou, the lack of awareness of the partnerships in recreation and fire projects, and the work planning system in program preparation and budget execution were pointed out.

The scheduled Caribou timber inventory is being negotiated between the Forest and appropriate RO staff. The radio system has received Regional funding in 1992 with additional funding planned for 1994. Updated radio equipment has been ordered and should be in place by the end of 1992.

The team found that the concepts of TQM were accepted whole-heartedly by personnel on the Caribou. However, the work of Quality Improvement Teams has been perceived as unaccepted or questioned by the Management Team. This has resulted in mixed signals being given to some Caribou NF personnel as to the TQM commitment by the Management Team.

Many of the Forest employees who have direct dealings with the RO feel that the Caribou National Forest is taken for granted and is not recognized for the excellent work occurring on the Forest. Whether this is fact or not is irrelevant, as this perception is real for those persons with the feeling.

Suggestions

2-1 RO Staff should increase numbers of visits to the Caribou.

2-2 Caribou NF's document to the Regional Forester a listing of the partnerships engaged in for the past 3 years.

2-3 Quality Improvement Teams should be empowered and chartered to enact as well as to analyze and develop solutions.

2-4 RO Resource Directors should schedule a NEPA project review of the Caribou.

2-5 The RO, with leadership coming from the Regional Forester's Office, need to be sensitive to this situation and while issues and problems on the Caribou may not be as pressing and time consuming as those elsewhere in the Region, a concerted effort should be made by the RO to give more attention and praise to people and activities on the Caribou National Forest.

OBJECTIVE 3. Evaluate effectiveness of the Caribou NF organization structure, teamwork, and leadership.

Findings

Members of the Forest Management team and other Forest employees feel that the team is working together better than in the past. While team effort has improved, they are still struggling with their conflict resolution and decisionmaking skills. Part of the team are satisfied with how they function as a team. Others are dissatisfied and want changes. The Forest Supervisor wants a consensus of the group before taking on team building, conflict resolution training etc.

Morale among Caribou NF personnel appears to be good and on an upward trend. The factors that are keeping morale from rising even higher are ones that are not management or Management Team induced. They tend to be factors controlled by others such as tight budget constraints and poor office working conditions. The Supervisor's Office and Pocatello Ranger District share space with other Federal agencies, a US Senator, Representative, and the Federal courts in a Federal Building in Pocatello, Idaho. There have been four reductions and shuffling of Forest Service office space in recent years. The Montpelier and Soda Springs Ranger Districts are very cramped. The public service facilities at all three locations are poor.

The District Support Services Supervisors (SSS) on the Forest have recently taken it upon themselves to meet, discuss mutual problems and issues, and share ideas. When this was proposed, the Supervisor's Office quizzed the group on what they would be discussing, and approved their agenda. The Support Service Supervisors' reaction was that the SO didn't trust them.

Suggestions

3-1 The review team feels that the Forest Management Team should not wait for consensus and should embark on a planned program of training and skill development in such areas as team building, group decision making and conflict resolution.

3-2 The Forest, in conjunction with the Region, needs to examine the situation more closely to determine if there are other feasible, affordable alternatives to the current situation at all three locations.

3-3 The Supervisor's Office should assume a leadership role in bringing the SSS's together and develop a bond and team between the SO and Ranger District business management groups. Working as a team the combined Forest business management groups could analyze their current situation and jointly develop Forest direction in business management.

OBJECTIVE 4. Feedback Impressions and Identify Problems.

Findings

How does the Forest prepare for and deal with the emerging small diameter timber technology on the Caribou NF?

-- Small mills, especially the Jensen Mill at Ovid want to utilize small timber sizes for manufacturing various lumber products including pellets. The Forest would like to offer small sales of this material and was expecting to use data from the Forest and timber inventory to be done in 1992. However, for reasons not fully known to the Forest it was cancelled.
-- In an effort to provide more timber information, the Montpelier District will identify a pilot area for small diameter harvest.
-- However, this does not help the rest of the Caribou NF where this type of sale could be sold to replace declining large diameter sales.

Aspen market development needs emphasizing.

-- Marketing of saleable aspen for a variety of biological reasons needs to be improved. The Rangers with these type of stands have tried firewood sales, but these do not fill the need for adequate sales and stand improvement. Identification of, planning and advertising for aspen sales may well fill a need for aspen-derived products.

Regional Office budgeting for capitol investments and heavy maintenance on the Forest is not working.

-- The Forest is falling behind on planned capitol investments and in fact has not received maintenance and rehabilitation for paved roads and buildings. Forest Service owned buildings are run down, need painting and generally do not project a good image of a well-run organization. Example: Montpelier District warehouse building in the center of town.

The uniform wearing policy is not being conformed to 100 percent.

-- We found a considerable discrepancy. Wearing only parts of the uniform, or mixing non-standard forms of clothing with standard uniform items.

The team did not find any safety, health or welfare issues.

-- While this topic was discussed, the team was not told that any issues or situations needed correction. The Forest does have a good safety program, and it is working at all levels. It has an excellent wellness program at the Supervisor's Office and at those District Offices where this is possible.

Multi-Cultural Diversity.

-- There were a good number of women in professional and other jobs on the frontline, we did not see or hear from our interviews (internal or external) of problems in this area. However, the work force is not at the desired diversity level.
-- Pipeline Construction, Operations, and Maintenance plans (COM) have not been done. The project was being administered from an EA instead of a COM. Two large pipeline projects authorized by special-use permits did not have COM plans to bridge the gap between an EA and the special-use permit clauses. The COM plan is the document that carries out the recommendations of the EA and EIS and is made a part of the special-use permit by reference and attached thereto.

We identified no waste, fraud, abuse, or fiscal integrity issues, and our observations interviews with 32 internal and external individuals did not lead us to believe any of those exist on the Forest.

We saw numerous situations where the methodology and technology to get the desired results could benefit from closer ties to research--grazing issues, riparian restoration, and especially better land uses of reclaimed phosphate strip mines. While good reforestation work to control landslides and erosion is being done, the reclaimed land can perhaps be put higher and to more productive uses.

The Montpelier Ranger District of the Caribou NF is a logical extension of the "Wasatch Front" recreation use pattern. There is a need to provide more continuity of planning, budgeting, development, and recreation visitor information services between the Caribou and the Wasatch-Cache National Forests.

The Route 89 corridor is receiving recreation industry attention by all communities along it from Salt Lake City to Jackson, Wyoming. There needs to be continuity in Forest Plan direction along this corridor. This involves the Wasatch Front, Cache Valley, Bear Lake Valley, St. Charles and other side canyons, and Starr Valley on the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

Stronger professional management of threatened, endangered, and Regionally sensitive species is needed. The Bonneville and Fine-Spotted Cutthroat Trout need Regional Office, state, and federal research help to assist Forest level managers. The states of Idaho and Utah do not appear to have coordinated fisheries objectives on Bear Lake. Perhaps the Forest Service could be a catalyst in bringing clarity to objectives in water and fisheries shared in this important area.

The Regional Office needs to provide clearer direction on how to identify and manage rare and endangered and Regionally sensitive plants.

Forest personnel seem confident in their ability to use prescribed fire to improve sage invaded ranges, and to regenerate aspen. However, climatic and fuel windows for satisfactory burns invariably fall at times of high wildfire involvement Regionally. The Regional Office stops or delays burns, and objectives are not met. The Region needs to have a stronger understanding of fire management on the Caribou. The Forest Plan also needs considerable strengthening on fire management objectives, standards and guides.

The phosphate mining showcases have been very successful and public understanding and appreciation of the efforts needs to be strengthened through public information.

Suggestions:

4-1 The RO should assist the Forest in moving ahead with collection of information to proceed with the small diameter sales project.

4-2 The RO needs to provide sufficient funding to maintain and improve capital investments on buildings and paved roads.

4-3 The Forest Supervisor should see to it that those required to wear the correct uniform in the office and field do so.

4-4 The line officer should not approve these types of projects without those required COM plans. A handbook on COM plans is available for technical guidance.

List of Persons Interviewed

Name	Title	Organization
Aller, Bill		City, Hwy. Dept.
Brazell, Rick		
Bull, Dave		
Cook, Boyd		
Cook, Sheryl		
Eisenhauer, Phil		
Feltis, Scott		
Gorringe, Larry		
Hatch, John	Field Rep.	Senator Symms Office
Hess, Nancy		
Hunt, Jan		
Johnson, Mark		
Kimball, Phyllis		
King, Julie		
Klein, Harold		
Kohler, Diane		
Krueger, Faye		
Lyle, Carol		
Mattson, Eric		
Maughn, Ralph		Sierra Club
Padian, Bruce		
Pond, Earl	City Councilman	Pocatello City, ID
Reichmann, Mary	Manager/Op	Pebble Creek Ski
Tower, Jerry		
Trent, Tracy		Idaho Fish & Game
VanBebber, Rick		
Varilone, Tony		
Ward, Linda		
Watkins, Valerie	Field Rep.	Senator Craig's Office
Wolfe,Richard	Fire Chief	Pocatello Fire Dept.